



Saint Paisii Velichkovskii
Whom the Holy Church Commemorates on November 15.

Saint Paisii was born on December 21, 1722 in Poltava, Ukraine to a family of priests. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all priests. His mother became a nun later in life, as did his grandmother and aunt. He was baptized with the name of Petr. His father, Fr. John, was the rector of Dormition Cathedral.

His father reposed when Saint Paisii was four years old. Sent to school by his mother, Irina, he studied the Horologion and the Psalter for two years. His elder brother, a priest, taught him how to write. As soon as Petr had learned to read, reading became his favorite activity. He read and re-read all the spiritual books he could find at home and in the Cathedral's library. He read the Old and New Testaments, the lives of the Saints, the homilies of St. John Chrysostom, St Ephraim the Syrian and others. He was inspired with love for the monastic life by his continual reading of spiritual literature and especially the lives of the ascetics. He secluded himself in his room where he read continually and prayed. His silence was amazing. His family would not hear a word from him for days at a time. The Saint's joyful friendliness shone on his face; he was neither morose nor despondent. He was fully immersed in his inner life, in his treasured prayerful abiding in God. In the presence of people Petr was, in the words of his biographer, so shy and meek that even his own mother rarely heard his voice.



The City of Poltava, Ukraine in 2002

At the age of 13, Saint Paisii entered Kiev Theological School, which later became the Theological Academy. The academic discipline was on a very high level. Some 1200 students were in attendance at that time. Petr's interests, however, were not academic but monastic. He was interested in the salvation of the soul. He began his search for true monasticism. While in school in Kiev he, for a season, applied himself to his studies. Gradually, his academic zeal declined as his true vocation developed. A fellow student, himself a native of Poltava, noticed that, since Petr was not studying, his mother's money for tuition was probably being wasted. Informed of this, the prefect sent for Velichkovsky and asked for an explanation for his lack of attention to his studies. Petr replied:

"The first reason is that, because I have a firm intention of becoming a monk, and, being conscious of the unexpectedness of death, I want to be tonsured as soon as possible. The second reason is that I see nothing useful for the soul in external learning. I hear only the names of pagan gods and wise men—Cicero, Aristotle, and Plato. By learning their wisdom people of today have become blinded to the end and have digressed from the true way. Intellectuals utter words but, internally, they are filled with darkness and gloom, for their wisdom is of the world only... I do not say these things in judgment. After being trained in external wisdom, I fear and tremble that I, being a monk, will fall into worse infirmity and feebleness. For these reasons I left external learning."

Shortly thereafter, in 1739, one month short of age seventeen, Petr left the attractions of the world and began to search for true monasticism. He found a monastery near the Dnieper River where he began his monastic life. He was assigned to a cell with an old monk. After this monk reposed, the gentle hegumen Nikifor gave Petr this old monk's coarse grey cassock. Saint Paisii, deeply grateful for this gift, went back to his cell where he kissed the tattered garment like a sacred object. He wore it until he had to throw it away.

This hegumen was replaced by another man who was imperious. After having been struck so hard by him that Petr was nearly knocked off his feet, Saint Paisii, together with a friend, fled that monastery and crossed over to the right bank of the Ukraine.

At this time this part of the country had fallen on hard times. It was suffering very much because of the religious fanaticism of the Jesuits and the Uniates¹. Archbishop Filaret of Chernigov described this persecution in his history of the Church:

"It is difficult to imagine all the cruelties and torments endured by the Orthodox at this time. Orthodox priests were tied to stakes and scourged with whips, thrown into prison, refused food, dismembered of their fingers, and their arms and legs were broken. Any survivors of such tortures who still refused the Unia were driven from their homes. From day to day monasteries were attacked, plundered and burned, and the monks were tortured and often times killed. Rural dwellers, merchants and tradesmen were subjected to torture in order to force them into the Unia.

Like sheep, the Orthodox were driven into the Uniate Church. On one occasion, a henchman walked into an Orthodox Church during the Gospel reading and began beating the people there with a whip, driving them out like cattle. Many people suffered the destruction of their homes and death itself in the battles."

Saint Paisii, together with a friend, was on his way to Moldavia at this time and was aware of the risks that he and his companions as Orthodox Christians faced in their travels. Petr got caught in a violent thunderstorm with walnut-sized hailstones; separated from his friends, and soaked to the skin; he spent the night in a village hut. He found his companions staying in a school near the home of the village cantor. They had been asking him how to travel into Moldavia.

In response to this question the cantor said:

"Holy fathers, I advise you not to go there. Soldiers are patrolling the road everywhere in search of thieves and brigands. If you should fall into their hands, they will assault you cruelly out of their hatred for our Orthodox Faith. There was one such assault recently in our village. The cantor who preceded me here was afraid of denunciation by the persecutors of Orthodoxy. While reading the Creed during the Divine Liturgy he read the eighth article in the following way: 'And in the Holy Spirit the Lord and Giver of Life, Who truly proceeds from the Father;' and for some time he deceived the Uniates in this way.² Before long, however, he was reported to the landlord for not reciting the Creed according to the Uniate practice. Upon hearing this, the

¹The Uniates were members of a Roman Catholic group called the Unia because of its union with the Pope of Rome. The worship, music, and vestments were Orthodox in style but the *filioque* was inserted into the Creed and the Pope was commemorated during the Divine Liturgy.

² There is a play on words here. The Uniates wanted the cantor to say the Creed with the *filioque* which in Russian is *i syna*. The word 'truly,' which the cantor used in its place is *istinno*. Pronounced quickly, it would be hard to distinguish the two.

landlord went into a rage. He called a soldier and together they entered the Church just before the Creed according to the Uniate practice. When that blessed cantor had stepped out into the center of the church and began reading the Creed, the landlord drew near to him and listened to every single word attentively. The cantor knew why the landlord was present so he read especially loudly, slowly and triumphantly, and when he came to the words 'And in the Holy Spirit,' he himself being filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaimed loudly and distinctly: 'And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father,' omitting the word 'truly' which he had used to add to the text because of his fear. The landlord screamed out like a wild animal and, seizing the cantor by his hair, threw him onto the church floor and began kicking him. He had the cantor dragged out from the church and cruelly beaten with rods. While he was being beaten someone in the crowd rushed to fetch the mother of the cantor. She ran to her son and with tears in her eyes encouraged him not to lose his staunch spirit but to give up his life for his faith. 'Do not fear such fleeting suffering,' she said, 'but endure it unto death that you may be worthy to receive the crown of martyrdom from Christ in Heaven.' 'Have no doubts about me, dear mother,' the martyr said, 'for I am ready to endure not only these wounds for my faith but a thousand times more. This is the sure hope of my salvation.' Upon hearing such words, the mother of the cantor greatly rejoiced in her soul and she thanked Christ for allowing her to be the mother of a martyr for the faith. When the landlord saw and heard what was happening between the cantor and his mother, he ordered the soldiers to beat the martyr even more fiercely. Under the heavy blows the martyr finally delivered his soul into the hands of God."

This story alarmed the travelers. They heeded the cantor's advice and decided not to go to Moldavia. Petr met a pious hermit named Isikhii and chose to stay with him. Isikhii had a great love for spiritual books from the pens of the holy Fathers. Although Petr wanted to stay with him, Isikhii declined. Saint Paisii was seeking a spiritual father.

Farther along the way, at the St. Nikolai Monastery, Petr was tonsured a riasophore monk on the feast of the Transfiguration with the name Platon. At the instigation of the Uniates, storm clouds threatened. Platon, our Saint Paisii, decided to go to Kiev. He was admitted into the community of the Caves Lavra. A year later, with his friend Aleksei, Platon fled Kiev for Moldo-Walachia.

Here Platon first met Starets Vasilii of Poiana Marului. This Starets was to provide Platon with good counsel. Platon had heard that Starets Vasilii might want to ordain him to the priesthood; Platon did not want this to happen. Platon resolved this tension by moving to Mount Athos. A new period in his life began in 1746 when he moved to Mount Athos and ended in 1763 when he, with his synodia, left the Holy Mountain for Moldo-Walachia, i.e. modern Romania. Saint Paisii remained there until his repose in 1794.

Platon's life on Mount Athos during these 17 years may be summarized by four important events: 1) A period of seclusion 2) a search

for Patristic³ literature on prayer 3) another meeting with Starets Vasilii 4) and the formation of his monastic community.

Platon's seclusion was occasioned by his desire to be guided by someone who lived in silence and poverty and who was thoroughly conversant with Patristic literature. Since he could not find a monastic who met his criteria, he elected to live alone. By living in such a way for the four years' time, a shy and timid boy was transformed into a strong, experienced man. His time was spent in avid reading, chanting psalms, study of scripture, Patristic texts, and, most importantly, in interior prayer. Platon struggled to cultivate within himself profound humility, continual self-reproach, contrition of heart, an abundance of tears, love for God and neighbor, and a constant remembrance of death.

This intense and profitable internal struggle was, in Saint Paisii's case, complemented by a thoroughgoing search for accurate Patristic texts teaching the monk how to live the monastic life. These two tasks, 1) and 2) above, form the core of Saint Paisii's lifelong work. He was granted the grace continually to intensify these tasks until the end of his life. He never laid aside his translator's quill.

The search for Patristic literature on prayer began with an examination of the Slavonic texts on prayer that St. Paisii had collected. From this examination arose a clear realization of the innumerable errors in the Slavonic translations of these texts. St. Paisii then undertook the formidable task of correcting these inaccurate translations and the occluded passages in the Patristic texts. He writes,

"While I was still living on Mount Athos, I became well aware of the teachings and commandments our God-bearing Fathers as to how the director of a monastic community should guide or teach his monks, not on the basis of his own mentality and reasoning but rather through his adherence to the true and correct teachings of the Holy Scriptures, the Fathers, ecumenical teachers and instructors in monasticism, who were enlightened by the Holy Spirit. At the same time being cognizant of my own small-mindedness and apprehensive of my own inexperience, afraid of falling like a blind man into a

³ Patristic literature is comprised of those writings written by the holy Fathers of the Church who lived after the repose of the Apostles. Some of them, e.g. Ss. Dionysius the Aeropagite, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna, were taught by an Apostle. These Fathers are Orthodox Saints and have services written for them as recorded in the Menaion of the Orthodox Church. The word, 'patristic' is derived from the Greek word, 'patros,' which means 'father'. In terms of the faithful transmission of the Apostolic Faith, the order stands as St. Athanasius states it: "What Christ preached to the Apostles, the Apostles transmitted (traditioned) to the Fathers, and was kept by the Fathers" (*Ad Serapion* I, 28).

pit and bringing down along with myself others as well, I decided to adopt the Old and New Testaments, and the Sacred Tradition of the Church (the teachings of our God-bearing Fathers, the ecumenical teachers and instructors of monastic life, the rules of the apostolic councils and of our Holy Fathers, which are kept by the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of the East) and all their commandments and regulations as the unshakable foundation for monastic life. I adopted all this as guidance for myself and for my brethren in order that, living together and benefiting from this by co-operation and instruction of Divine Grace itself, we might not digress from the true, pure and wholesome Catholic mentality of the Holy Orthodox Church."

Difficulties, however, arose in St. Paisii's attempts to reconcile errors in the Slavonic transcriptions of Patristic texts. He came to understand that he could not correct the Slavonic texts by other texts in Slavonic. He found a way to overcome this problem:

"I lost all hope of finding any translations among Slavonic texts that would be as correct and accurate in meaning as the Hellenic Greek originals. After spending a few years on Mount Athos and being comfortable with at least simple, colloquial Greek, I attempted to locate original Greek texts in order to compare them with their Slavonic versions. No matter where I searched, I was unsuccessful. I went to St. Anna Skete of the Great Lavra, to the Sketes of Kapsokaliva, to the St. Demetrius Skete of Vatopedi and to many other lavras and monasteries, questioning knowledgeable people, experienced spiritual fathers and pious novices, but nowhere was I able to find even one such book. Not only did I receive the same negative reply from all whom I asked, but I also discovered that they were not even familiar with the names of the compilers. I was absolutely bewildered and wonder-struck that in such a holy place, where so many great saints lived, not only was I unable to locate their great ascetical writings but their names were not even known. This saddened me tremendously. Nevertheless my hope in God was not destroyed and I prayed to Him to help me find the precious sources. My gentle and merciful God answered my fervent prayer. I finally found the books for which I was searching and some I even obtained as personal possessions.

My good fortune happened in the following way. On one such occasion I was traveling with two monks from the St. Athanasius Lavra to the St. Anna Skete and I was passing near the high hill of the Prophet Elias Skete which was the same height as the third highest peak of Holy Athos. At the top of this hill was St. Basil the Great Monastery which has been built by monks who had left Caesarea Cappadocia. The Skete was situated in a most barren locale where—aside from rain—there was no water source. There were neither vineyards, nor olive nor fig trees. We wanted to stop by, partly to give our regards and partly to look around since we had never been in this particular skete. We entered and sat near the church. A novice noticed us and immediately invited us to his cell. He went to find some food to give us after our journey. As I stood at the open window of his cell I noticed an open book on his little table. It was obviously the transcription of some monk. I examined it more closely and discovered that it was a text by St. Peter the Damascene. Ineffable joy flooded my soul. I felt that I had found a heavenly treasure on earth.

When the novice returned, I asked him how such a precious book had ended up in his cell. He replied that he still had another book by the same saint. In reply to my further inquires, the novice disclosed where I could find other ascetical books: the works of Ss.

Anthony the Great, Gregory the Sinaite, Philotheus, Hesychius, Diodochus, Thalassius, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicephoros, Isaiah and others. When I asked him why I had been unable to locate any of these books, he answered that no one was able to read them. They were written in pure Hellenic Greek which none but educated Greeks could read. Thus these books were almost completely forgotten. The novices who had just arrived Caesarea Cappadocia came to Athos when they learned not only colloquial Greek but ancient Greek as well in order to copy these books and to study them as best they could. Filled with joy over the news I had heard, I begged the novice to make copies of his books for me and promised to pay whatever sum he would require. The novice was so overburdened with copy work at the time, however, that he was forced to refuse and directed me to another copier instead. When I asked the second, also a novice, I promised him triple the price that was usually requested by the first novice. But, seeing my burning desire to have the books, he refused the triple sum and promised to copy the books with the help of God for the regular price.

This gift of grace is how Saint Paisii finally acquired his long desired treasure. He could now begin to correct the Slavonic texts on prayer and the monastic life to bring them in harmony with their originals which were written in the Byzantine Greek of the Fathers of the Church.

This happened only two years before his departure from Mount Athos to Moldavia. By that time, the novice who had agreed to copy the books was able to finish only a portion of what Saint Paisii had requested. Nevertheless the Saint accepted them as a gift from God and carried them away with him to Moldo-Walachia where he used them for his subsequent exhaustive work in the correction of Slavonic patristic⁴ texts.

Previously we listed four points that occupied Saint Paisii's attention. We now turn to the third point, the proper order of monastic life.

⁴ It is impossible to overestimate the importance of prayer. The object of Saint Paisii's search is the very heart of the life of any Orthodox Christian. We can learn to pray when, first, we have an Orthodox Bishop who is not alone but is a member of a synod of faithful (faithful to the vows they took when they were ordained) Orthodox Hierarchs. Then, second, when we have close at hand an ascetical priest to whom we can look for an example and turn for help when we have to navigate difficult straits in our lives. We can then undertake the profitable labor of prayer.

Prayer is, as Saint John Climacus writes in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, "the mother of virtues" (see Step 28). When we have the mother, then we have all her children, that is, all the virtues. Since this is true in everyday life, so, the Orthodox Fathers teach us, it is true in our life in the Holy Spirit. In our Orthodox prayer, we draw up from the Baptismal Font all our future benefits. Plunged and immersed three times into the waters of Baptism, we partake of Christ's three days in the tomb, we partake of all the saving energies of the Holy Trinity, and we enter here in this transient life into the power of the endless life of Christ (Heb. 7:16) in which the days have no night, the sunrise is not followed by sunset, and the glory of Christ forever grows in our hearts.

In the beginning of 1750, Starets Vasilii arrived on Mount Athos. Saint Paisii, at this time known as the Riasophore Platon, had previously known Starets Vasilii in Walachia. Starets Vasilii's arrival on the Holy Mountain was of considerable importance for Platon. Starets Vasilii explained to Platon the danger of silence and solitude and the necessity of a community life for beginning ascetics. Starets Vasilii made it abundantly clear that all of monastic society is divided into three types.

The first type, cenobitic monasticism, is community monasticism whereby many monks, living together in a community, share a common routine, and a common life under obedience to an Abbot. All property is community property; no one has anything that can be called one's own. All meals are taken together in silence listening to the reading of the Lives of Saints. The community worships together. The second type, semi eremitic monasticism, is the sharing of a common life by two or three monks who settle together and live in obedience to each other out of their love and fear of God. Any property, such as food or clothing, is shared by the brotherhood. They live by exchanging their handicrafts for goods. Each of these Fathers lives in concern for one another and remains detached from his individual personal will. The community, as in the case of the cenobitic monks, worships together.

Only holy and perfect men are suitable for the third type of monasticism, the eremitic life. They live alone and may, or may not, gather for Saturday and Sunday liturgies and fellowship. Such monastics maintain a life of quietness, a stillness of the heart and of the body. In this atmosphere of silence and seclusion, these fathers practice the prayer of the heart, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me." This is the hesychastic path, the way of stillness, of *hesychia*.

Starets Vasilii also mentioned another path. Currently, he indicated, some monks opposing the directions of the Fathers are choosing a fourth form of life for themselves. Each monk builds his own grotto where he lives by himself and independently from other monastics. Each monk prefers the dictates of his own will to a life of obedience under the direction of a spiritual guide. Although such individuals may seem similar to the eremites, they are actually quite arbitrary in their existence. They, in fact, hinder their own salvation because they follow a path of life for which they are spiritually inadequate. After a careful reading of Gregory the Sinaite, one will discover that what is referred to as *arbitrariness* is actually such a cloistered, self-determined way of life. It is far better for one to live together with one's brothers, to acknowledge one's own faults, to repent daily, and thereby to be cleansed by Christ than to cover such faults by a feigned existence. Such people, says Saint John Climacus, cannot see any indications of their passionateness. St. Barsanuphius says that premature silence is the cause of high-mindedness.⁵

At Platon's request, Starets Vasilii tonsured him to the rank of mantiya-bearer and changed his name to Paisii.

In 1763, Saint Paisii and his community of monks decided to leave Mount Athos and to settle in Moldo-Walachia. Great labors of prayer preceded this decision. There was, perhaps, some exchange of letters between the Saint and Spiritual and secular authorities. In a letter to the

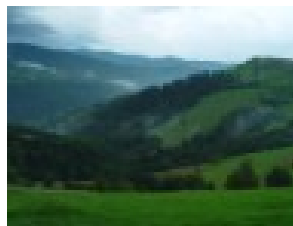
⁵ This path is known as Idiorhythmic monasticism.

Priest Demetrius the Elder outlines his reasons for having to leave Mount Athos.

The very location, so cruel and difficult, was hardly conducive to life on Mount Athos, since two or three monks living together could hardly meet their bodily needs even with bodily sweat and hard labor. What made life even more difficult was the great number of monks.⁶ Beside that, the Turkish rulers would demand tributes from our impoverished community similar to those paid to them by the other monasteries of Athos which, as I was told, were obligatory and fixed. For these reasons and others, about which I have already written to you, we feared that our community, created by much labor and effort, would be broken apart and meet its end. I therefore put all my hope in Almighty God, who is praised in all places of His dominion, and decided to leave with my community from the Holy Mountain for the Orthodox land, Moldo-Walachia.

Saint Paisii was 41 years old at his time. He rented two ships, one for the Slavic monks and the other for the Moldavian fathers. The Saint traveled with the Slavic monks; Father Vissarion, the first member of his community on Mount Athos, sailed with the Moldavian monks. They set sail and landed first in Constantinople and then went on to Galati, where the Saint, seventeen years earlier, had set out for Mount Athos.

They were first placed in the Varzareshti Skete, and then allowed to enter the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Dragomirna, Bukovina. This monastery was probably founded at the end of the 16th century. It is located in the beautiful Carpathian mountain valleys.



A View of the Carpathian Mountains

The following is a selection from a note Saint Paisii wrote to the monks who went into the fields at harvest time:

Beware of envy. Wherever there is envy, God's spirit does not exist. Control the tongue, so that it will not utter empty words. Whoever preserves his tongue preserves his soul from grief. Life and death both come from the tongue. The old should teach the young and the inexperienced. Everyone should have humility, kindness, and love. It is necessary to strengthen oneself by the fear of God and by the memory of death and eternal sufferings.

⁶ By this time the Saint's brotherhood had grown to 64 monastics.

One's thoughts should be told to the Starets every day.⁷ The Jesus Prayer is to be repeated constantly. Offer a pure, undefiled, and sweet-smelling sacrifice to God, according to your Christian promises. Offer your labors and bloody sweat as a burnt sacrifice. Let sunburn be for you as the Endurance of the martyrs.

In concluding the letter the Saint prays that God will save those who labor from all spiritual and bodily harm, and protect them from the wiles of the devil.

A note from the Saint's biographer includes this comment:

"I lived thirteen years with him, and never saw him grieving over material needs. The only time he would grieve intensely was whenever he saw the violation of God's commandments."



† THE SUCEVITSA MONASTERY IN BUKOVINA
NO ONLINE PICTURES OF ANY OF THE MONASTERIES
IN WHICH SAINT PAISIИ LIVED ARE AVAILABLE AS OF
DECEMBER, 2006.

In spite of his constant solicitude for the brotherhood, Saint Paisii found time for his concern to provide the Church with authentic patristic literature concerning prayer and the spiritual life. He devoted whole nights to this task. Traveling from Mount Athos with the patristic treasures

⁷ On telling thoughts: "Each evening the brethren, beginners in particular, would come to their starets to confess their thoughts. The Saint considered the confession of thoughts to be the basis of spiritual life and saw in it the hope for salvation of the soul which sincerely repents of its sins."

written in Byzantine Greek obtained there, he began the detailed examination and correction of his Slavonic translations in Dragomirna.

In his textual-critical labors of the late 18th century, Saint Paisii anticipated the very methods employed by the scholars of the 19th century. His work was all done by hand. He sent the more scholarly monks to the Bucharest Academy to learn the grammar and vocabulary of Byzantine Greek, that is, the elevated Greek of the Fathers of the Church. This additional skill enabled his monks to continue in the path of his textual-critical discipline. The subsequent scholarly work done on *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* in Moscow endeavored to follow the strict standards laid down by Saint Paisii in the field of literary criticism. This particular work also adhered closely to Saint Paisii's own spiritual experience in effecting a translation of Saint Isaac's text that was faithful to the hesychastic tradition established in the deserts of Egypt and Palestine even before the middle of the second century. Regrettably, Saint Paisii did not have access to scholarship in the Syriac in which Saint Isaac originally penned his *Homilies*.

Saint Paisii also became an advisor to other monastic communities especially in the Ukraine and in Russia.

The following is an excerpt from a letter the Saint wrote to the nun Maria Petrovna Protas'eva, head of St. Aleksei Community in Arzamas, Russia:

"Diligently, with much attention and reflection, read in the Fathers about the prayer performed by the mind in the heart, which is the truest and most pleasing to God of the monastic feats. Should you, with God's help, acquire a correct understanding of this prayer through studying the Fathers, compel yourself to fulfill it, appealing to God for help, and your soul will be aided greatly by it. Compel yourself to judge no one, for the sole righteous judge is Christ the Lord, who will give to everyone according to his deeds. Condemn only yourself, and you will not be condemned at His second and awesome coming. From your whole heart remit the sins of whomever sins before you, and your Father who is in heaven will remit your sins."

In another context, the Saint quotes St. Symeon Archbishop of Thessalonica on the Jesus Prayer:

"This divine prayer of our Saviour consists of the appeal: O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me. This prayer is supplication, confession of faith, the giver of the Holy Spirit and the bestower of divine gifts, the purification of the heart, the expulsion of demons, the indwelling of Jesus Christ, the source of spiritual ideas and divine thoughts, deliverance from sins, the ministering to souls and bodies, the giver of divine illumination and the source of God's mercy, the giver of revelations and divine mysteries to the meek, and it is salvation itself, for it carries within itself the saving Name of our God—this being the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God which was betrothed to us."

Saint Paisii continues, "Likewise, the other God-bearing Fathers, writing about this holy prayer, bear witness to its action, to the ineffable benefit derived from it, and to the progress through it in the exercise of the divine gifts of the Holy Spirit." (From *The Teaching of Starets Paisii on the Jesus Prayer in Six Chapters*.)

The teaching of the Holy Fathers on the Prayer of Jesus was, as we noted above, given first place in the Typicon of Saint Paisii's Monasteries by being required to be said by all the monks as their own prayer. The effect of this practice in the Saint's monasteries spread after his repose as is evident in the spiritual inheritance of the Glinskaia Hermitage where we hear of "Hieromonk Serapion, who saw his guardian angel and fingered his prayer rope for three hours after his death."

Saint Paisii had full and unqualified faith in the holy Fathers of the Holy Orthodox Church. He followed the word of Saint Euthymius the Great: "Be careful and heed the teaching of the Fathers as though it were the word of God Himself" (*The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, Vol. 5: January, p. 345). Our Saint encouraged others to approach the holy Fathers in the same way:

"I plead and ask you from my whole heart to have undoubting faith in the Fathers and in the teachings contained in them, for they all agree in all respects with the Divine Scriptures and with the minds of all the ecumenical teachers and the entire Holy Church, because one and the same Holy Spirit was working in them. The teaching found in the Fathers is truly instruction for monks wishing to be saved..."

Touching upon a question of considerable interest over 200 years later in the 21st century, Saint Paisii is asked by a correspondent about a certain conciliar anathema imposed by the Eastern Patriarchs.

He replies,

"My answer is that a curse or anathema upon those opposing the Catholic Church...and not submitting to the Church...which has been imposed by a council of Eastern Patriarchs, remains through the grace of Christ firm, unshakable, and irreversible until the end of the age. You also ask if any Eastern council has lifted... [an] anathema which has been imposed. And I answer, Could there be such a council, except for one in opposition to God and the Holy Church, which would assemble to repudiate the truth and confirm falsehood? There would never be such an evil council.

"And you ask if any bishops can lift such a curse without the Council's knowledge and the consent and will of the Eastern Patriarchs. And I say this is totally impossible.

"Keep in mind that all the bishops receive the same grace of the Holy Spirit when they are consecrated and are obliged to guard, as the apple of the eye, the purity and immaculacy of the Orthodox faith, along with all the apostolic traditions and rules of the holy apostles, ecumenical and local councils, and the God-bearing Fathers contained in the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. From the same Holy Spirit they received the authority to bind and loose according to the order established by the Holy Spirit through the holy Apostles in the Holy Church.

"The bishops did not receive the authority to destroy the Apostolic Traditions and rules of the Church from the Holy Spirit.

"Therefore, neither the bishops nor the Eastern patriarchs can lift the above anathema placed on the opponents of the catholic Church, as having been imposed correctly and in accordance ... [with] the holy Councils. If anyone would attempt to do this, it would be against God and the Holy Church. You also ask that if none of the bishops can lift this anathema without the Eastern patriarchs, has it not been lifted by the latter?

"I answer that not only any bishop without the Eastern Patriarchs, but the Eastern Patriarchs themselves cannot lift this curse, as has sufficiently been said already, for such an anathema is eternally irrevocable."

Elsewhere he remarks,

"...hold to the healthy mind and reasoning of the Catholic Church in everything, and in this you will never fall into error."

Continuing in this vein, the Saint poses a question that has been addressed to him, and makes his reply,

"Can a true Christian have and read books forbidden by the Church...?"

"My answer is that the Divine Church forbids reading heretical books and holding discussions with heretics. In a book on the profession of the Orthodox Faith, there is a question asking 'What is the fifth commandment of the Church?'⁸

The answer is that those who are unlearned in the Holy Scriptures and other necessary fields should neither read heretical books nor listen to the harmful teachings of heretics, or even speak or have dealings with them, as the psalm-singer prophet says: 'Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners...' (Ps. 1:1 LXX). Elsewhere the Holy Scripture says: 'As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him' (Titus 3:10). Watch carefully and note that the Divine Church does not command everyone not to read heretical books and not to hold discussions with heretics, but only those who are unlearned in the Holy Scriptures and the various fields of learning.... This is why the Church forbids those who are unlearned in the Holy Scriptures and the other fields to read heretical books and to have discussions with heretics, so that they will not, due to their unsophistication, be harmed by their teachings. Those who have studied the Holy Scriptures and the other fields are exempt from this commandment... Thus, one who starts reading schismatic books must lack neither theological knowledge nor worldly learning. For the one who does not have the appropriate knowledge, it is better to obey God and the Church commandment which says: 'Do not read heretical books and do not take part in discussions with heretics.'... True Christians obey the Church in everything."

In the question above raised by a layman, and Saint Paisii's compassionate and comprehensive response, he displays in words the sweetness of character that so enlightened him as he addressed his disciples as to inspire the author of his Kontakion to pen these lines:

"Thou wast joyful of mien; thou didst incline thine ear unto them that asked for thine aid and didst stretch forth thy hand to lift them up..."

⁸ Our resources do not indicate what this might be. Still we may safely assume that Saint Paisii is referring to a standard catechetical text.

What greater accolade could anyone possibly receive?

Returning to our sources, we see that the Saint writes,

"I answer your last question, in which you ask me how you can be saved while living in the world with wives and children, in the following manner.

"Who can include in a brief word everything relating to the matter of salvation? I can only give you my advice to read the Divine Scriptures and our Holy Fathers with the greatest zeal, for to them is given the understanding of the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom, i.e. the true sense of the Holy Scriptures. In their soul-enlightened teachings, we can find in their entirety, all instructions necessary for spiritual salvation, which inspire anyone wishing to be saved to perform various good deeds and flee any deeds contrary to God. Reading their teaching zealously and diligently with faith and love, and with the fear of God and complete attention, you will have constant encouragement for various good deeds necessary for your salvation. And I, with all my unworthiness, recognizing that you are seeking instruction from me, can answer as follows:

"The most merciful God saves the souls of Orthodox Christians through the Orthodox Faith, good deeds, and His grace. The Orthodox faith is the one which is contained in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, and without this faith it is impossible to be saved. Good deeds are Gospel Commandments without which, as without the Orthodox faith, it is likewise impossible for anyone to be saved. The Orthodox faith without good deeds is a dead faith, and good deeds without the Orthodox faith are dead deeds. Whoever wishes to be saved must unite the two, and in this way, through the grace of Christ God, who said, 'Without Me you can do nothing,' he can try to attain salvation. One should know that Christ the Saviour made good deeds equally obligatory for all Orthodox Christians, be they monks or laymen living in the world with wives and children, and seeks and demands from everyone the most zealous performance of His commandments, so that those who violate them and do not repent will have no excuse and will not be able to stand at His awesome Second Coming. All Orthodox Christians...can...fulfill Christ's commandments, with the help of God's grace, without any difficulty through only their good will and spiritual humility, and in this way they can be saved."

Saint Paisii closes with these words:

"And if in my answers I have erred in anything as a human being, then do not follow my error, but hold to the healthy mind and reasoning of the Catholic Church in everything, and in this way you will never fall into error. Let the God of love and peace be with all of you. Amen."

Saint Paisii's move to the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Dragomirna, Bukovina was followed by a short residence in Dragomir due to war between Russia and Turkey. The Fathers evacuated to Secu where the Saint's labors in translation began in earnest. Facilities here were cramped. In 1779 the Saint was required to move to Niamets. This was an occasion for grievous tears for the Saint. One of the blessings of life on the Holy Mountain, in Dragomir and Secu was the absence of women. The move to Niamets placed his community near centers of population. The Saint was apprehensive over such proximity to towns and villages and of the consequent disturbance to

the undistracted quiet that is an absolute necessity for a hesychast. Nevertheless, the Saint did obedience to Prince Konstantin and made the move. He left some of his monks in Secu and he moved to Niamets with all the others. The number of brethren now gathered around him exceeded 700. Word of the monastery's adherence to Patristic monastic order, and its rule of prayer spread throughout the Slavic, Orthodox East. Once again, we have evidence of the Victory of Orthodoxy. Jesus Christ Conquers.⁹

After a brief illness Saint Paisii at the age of 72 reposed on November 15, 1794.

As during the beginning of Christianity in Russia, the planting of the seeds of Orthodoxy owed a great deal to Saints Anthony and Theodosius of the Caves and their disciples, of whom many became the first bishops of Russia, so later did Saint Sergius of Radonezh and his disciples become responsible for the strengthening of Orthodoxy. In the 18th and 19th centuries the disciples of Saint Paisii played a leading role in the rebirth of Russian Monasticism and the rise of starchestvo or eldership through the unerring foundation in Orthodox Patristic teaching and discipline provided by the Saint.

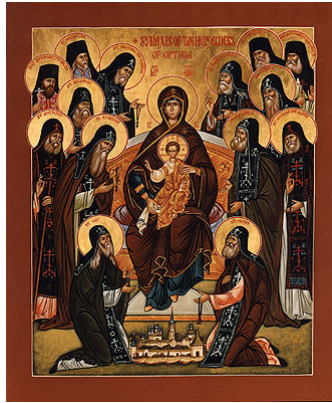
The disciples of Saint Paisii were widely influential among monastics—on the Holy Mountain, in Moldavia and in Russia. Russia accounted for a particularly large number of his students, under whom a broad rebirth of spiritual life arose. Three main currents are evident: the Northern, Central and Southern branches. The Northern movement had centers in the Solovetsky, Valaam, St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra and St. Alexander Svirsky Monasteries. The Central movement was concentrated in Moscow in the Vladimir guberniya, Optina Hermitage and later in the Orlov guberniya. In the South, Saint Paisii's fidelity to holy tradition was welcomed in the

⁹ Saints Macarius Bishop of Corinth (1731-1805) and Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809) joined in the compilation of selected material from the holy Fathers on the prayer of the heart and the ordering of the monastic life that offered guidance to Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians similar to the work of Saint Paisii Velichkovsky (1722-1794) which likewise enabled Orthodox Christians in the Slavic lands to make similar efforts in their own struggles. The Greek *Philokalia* or "Love of Beauty" was published in Venice in 1782. Saint Paisii's Slavonic *Dobrotolubiye* (Philokalia) was published in Moscow in 1783.

He completed his major work, the translation of Saint Isaac the Syrian's *Ascetical Homilies*, in 1787. He wrote all his translations out by hand. "Each letter was as thin as a hair and did not smear, but came out distinct and clean, and the necessary margins were left on both sides, on top, and at the bottom. When an amazed pupil asked the starets if he had written that book with a pigeon quill, he replied, 'No, with a goose quill.'" Thanks be to God for all things.

Ploshchansky and Glinsky Hermitages. The circle of influence of Saint Paisii Velichkovsky was dominant in Russia; it spread through 35 dioceses.

The Fathers of the Optina Hermitage relied heavily on their Paisiian heritage. They can be credited, in very large part, with the preparation of Orthodox Russia to receive the tens of millions of Crowns of Martyrdom that were bestowed during the Revolution of the godless Bolsheviks.



❖❖❖ THE OPTINA FATHERS ❖❖❖

SAINT PAISII VELICHKOVSKY

*Dismissal Hymn
Plagal of Fourth Tone*

WITH the streams of thy tears, thou didst cultivate the barrenness of the desert; and by sighing from the depths, thou didst bear fruit a hundredfold in labours; and thou becamest a luminary, shining with miracles upon the world, O Paisius our righteous father, intercede with Christ God that our souls be saved.

*Another Dismissal Hymn
Second Tone*

HAVING been a wanderer upon the earth thou didst reach the heavenly homeland, O righteous father Paisius, struggler and lover of the good, thou didst instruct the people to raise their minds to God and to cry to Him with their hearts: Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me a sinner.

Kontakion
Fourth Tone

THOU wast joyful of mien; thou didst incline thine ear unto them that asked for thine aid and didst stretch forth thy hand to lift them up, therefore we pray: intercede that our souls may be saved.



The glorification of Saint Paisii Velichkovskii under Saint Metropolitan Philaret was preformed by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia on the Feast Day of the Holy Prophet Elias on July 20, 1982 at the Russian Skete of St. Elias on Mount Athos, which was founded by Saint Paisii.



† THE SKETE OF SAINT ELIAS ON MOUNT ATHOS.
IN 1757 SAINT PAISIИ WITH MANY MOLDAVIAN AND UKRAINIAN MONKS
SETTLED HERE WHERE A FEW HESYCHASTIC FATHERS WERE STRUGGLING.
The new Catholicon dates from 1903.



A FINAL NOTE

Saint Paisii's relics were discovered to be incorrupt during the last investigation of them in 1872, as well as in the previous years of 1846, 1853, and 1861.

Icon of Saint Paisii Velichkovsky courtesy of Holy Nativity Convent Brookline, Massachusetts 02445
Icon of the Optina Fathers courtesy Holy Transfiguration Monastery Brookline, Massachusetts 02445

The brief text is drawn from <http://www.russianorthodoxchurch.ws>, articles, and from

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And to our God be glory.

